

Suggested Remarks
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Acknowledgements: (TBD)

Mabuhay! Good morning.

It's a great pleasure for me to be here today, representing the Government of the United States, and the American people to witness all of the positive developments unfolding in this beautiful region of the Philippines. We in USAID have been your partner in many of these developments, and because of this I've had an opportunity to observe, first-hand, the steady progress being achieved in many sectors throughout Mindanao.

I know, and of course you know as well, that because of the history of conflict in this region, Mindanao is often associated in the minds of those who do not live here with social unrest and civil conflict. This is a terribly unfortunate misperception, and it's my hope that news of all the successful, peaceful development efforts being undertaken throughout Mindanao will soon overshadow the negative perceptions sometimes reflected in the foreign and national press.

You and I know that the **real** Mindanao—which is home to twenty-five percent of the country's population, and comprises thirty percent of the land in the Philippines—is not primarily a region of violence, but, rather, is an area of economic growth; an area whose business and political leadership is committed to peace, development and prosperity; an area which is making steady progress in providing prosperous, peaceful lives for its inhabitants.

There's no doubt that Mindanao is on the move, and we can see evidence of its progress in almost every sector. In the Agriculture and Fisheries sectors, for example, produce from the fertile farms and seas of this region is regularly appearing on the dinner tables of Asian, European and American families. Chinese and American consumers can now shop at Walmart for Philippines mango products, and families throughout Asia have started to experience the delights of fish from the region and the great taste of Mindanao bananas.

But Mindanao's growth and development is reflected in other sectors as well, and investors have begun to take notice, as recent investments in cold chain facilities and call centers attest. In support of these and other efforts, the national and provincial governments, often supported by donor agencies, have initiated dozens of infrastructure projects throughout the region, both to improve the quality of life of Mindanao's citizens, and to

improve the productive capacity of the area's economy.

There is every reason to be optimistic about the future of Mindanao. All of the factors necessary for continued growth and prosperity are being put in place. A lot has been accomplished in a relatively short span of time. But we cannot rest on past and present accomplishments. There is still a lot to be done.

Efforts to extend and sustain peace throughout the region must continue and must be successful. Additional infrastructure must be constructed to sustain improvements in productivity. The quality of education, which is the backbone of a skilled labor force, must be raised to ensure that Mindanao's young people are able to participate in and contribute to the region's growth - and successfully compete with their peers in the rest of the Philippines and in the Asia region. That means there must be much more

emphasis placed on math and science, and on English language instruction. Efforts to better manage Mindanao's vital watersheds and coastal and maritime resources must be intensified. If you lose your watersheds and coastal resources become further degraded, your economy will suffer dramatic reversals. And finally, continuous efforts to establish transparent, effective governance, to improve the business environment and to firmly embed the rule of law throughout the region must continue and expand.

Several initiatives in each of these areas are underway, and USAID has been working with the national, regional and provincial governments, as well as the private sector, throughout Mindanao, in each of these areas. Together, we have accomplished a great deal.

By the end of August 2007, for example, USAID and its partners in the public and private sectors will have:

- Constructed over 800 new infrastructure projects;
- Worked with farmers, food processors and exporters to expand the volume of agricultural exports from Mindanao to the rest of the world;
- Electrified approximately 7,000 homes in remote communities with renewable energy;
- Connected over 600 schools to the Internet; and,
- Enabled 7,400 out-of-school youth to seek high school equivalency accreditation or re-enter the formal school system.

These efforts must, and will continue.

There's no doubt at all that Mindanao is headed in the right direction. We in the Government of the United States will continue to work with our partners in all levels of government in the Philippines, and with the private sector, to

support you in your efforts to create a prosperous, peaceful and stable region.

I wish all of you a productive and successful conference, and I thank you for having invited me to participate.